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ABSTRACT

Twenty-three schools and agencies offering high school credit correspondence courses were surveyed to investigate options for gifted students, particularly students in rural areas or in schools with limited curricula. Among the findings were that high school credit is available from universities, from the Massachusetts and North Dakota state departments of education, and from the Home Study Institute (Washington, DC); course titles are rather traditional and suggest standard curricular coverage; and the only criteria for being "gifted" is a letter of permission from a principal or counselor. Areas to consider prior to deciding on correspondence courses as a beneficial option are listed, including whether the home school will accept the credit for the course, who will bear the costs, will the course count toward college requirements, and does the student have a place and time for study. A table presents a statistical analysis of survey responses. (SB)

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Correspondence Courses for Gifted Students

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Correspondence Courses for Gifted Students

Correspondence courses are frequently cited as an option for gifted students (e.g. Silverman, 1980), particularly for students in rural areas or in schools with limited curricula. A number of correspondence course options exist, generally as non-credit courses, high school credit, or college credit courses. Non-credit courses are available from a variety of sources--some reputable, some not--and are subject only to the student's interests and time (and budget) in everything from art to zymurgy.

Credit courses, however, are most often offered by universities or state education departments and allow the student to increase or expand school curricular possibilities. Credit courses may be taken for either high school or college credit or--in some instances--simultaneous high school and college credit. Completing high school courses by correspondence may be useful:

> "(1) to expand and enrich the curriculum of the local high school; (2) to provide courses for which a teacher cannot be employed; (3) to bring high school credit to the isolated student; (4) to educate the handicapped; (5) to serve post-graduates and adults; (6) to aid when scheduling conflicts occur; (7) to help the transfer student meet the local curriculum requirements; and (8) to assist the drop-outs to complete their high school education" (University of Wyoming, n.d.).

The National University Extension Association (Hunter, 1980) publishes a guide to 69 schools, most of which are accredited by regional accrediting agencies. This guide lists universities and agencies offering high school or college credit courses, with further delineation of courses available. For more complete specification, the thirty-two schools and agencies listed as offering high school credit were surveyed. For the twenty-three responses, Table 1. lists the numbers of courses offered by each school or agency in several academic areas.

Table 1. displays the considerable range of courses, and numbers of courses available from these schools. High school credit is available from universities, from the state departments of education in Massachusetts and North Dakota, and from the Home Study Institute (further described below). The compilations in the table do not identify specific specializations (for example, Social Science may include anthropology, economics, geography, government, history, psychology, religion, and sociology), nor does this table indicate, other than by numbers, the breadth of courses in any one area. For example, most schools offering foreign language include French, German, Spanish, and, perhaps, Latin, but two include Russian (Univ. of Idaho, North Dakota), two include Norwegian (North Dakota, Univ. of Wisconsin), the University of Minnesota states that university courses are offered for high school credit, and the

University of Wisconsin offers Arabic, French, German, Hebrew, Italian, Norwegian, Portugese, Russian, and Spanish! Several of these schools also offer an array of non-credit courses. Of particular interest to gifted students may be the six schools which offer the textbook materials for driver education, the University of Texas course on data processing, and the University of Wisconsin Fundamentals of FORTRAN Programming course.

Course titles, for the most part, are rather traditional and suggest standard curricular coverage, though the student may also find a few courses such as the literature of comic books, or women writers, as interesting electives. Thus, correspondence courses are intended to be optional ways of meeting curricular requirements, rather than substitutions to them.

Of the schools listed, sixteen specifically state than some college courses are open to high school students; and the University of Nebraska, the University of Texas, and the Home Study Institute have indicated that high school courses may be available to younger students. The NUEA guide lists 47 schools which indicate that college courses may be offered to "gifted high school" students. However, the student should be aware that restrictions may be placed on which courses, or the number of courses which can be completed by the pre-college student. The only criteria for being "gifted" is a letter of permission from a principal or counselor.

The NUEA guide also states that seven universities offer

a gifted education teacher's course, but this is not the case. In fact, only the University of California at Berkely offers such a course, the other schools including some materials in a general special education overview course.

Also of particular interest may be the Home Study Institute (Takoma Park, Washington, D.C. 20012). This is a private institute sponsored by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. They offer correspondence courses at preschool, elementary, secondary, and college levels. While offerings are limited, this could be an attractive alternative for the younger student.

Although correspondence courses do offer an option which may be beneficial to some students, the student needs to clarify several things prior to assuming that this is the best option:

1. If the course in intended for credit, will the home school accept this correspondence course and give credit for it?
2. Does the correspondence course yield equivalent credit to that of the home school, or are there yet other requirements?
3. Who pays for tuition, fees, and other expenses--is the student expected to bear all of these costs?
4. Will the home school provide time or necessary facilities for completing the course during school hours?
5. Will home school faculty provide support and encouragement for the student?
6. Is there a limit to the number of correspondence courses the student may take?

If the high school student anticipates taking college courses, then yet other questions need to be asked:

1. Can the student also get high school credit for this course? What extra procedures will be required?
2. As the student goes on to college, will this course count? Will it fit college requirements? Will it count as a major or a general education course equivalent?
3. If this course will not be counted in college, will it help the student prepare for CLEP?
4. Is there a limit to the number of correspondence courses or other stipulation?
5. What type of financial, and tutorial assistance is available?

For any student taking a correspondence course, the following should be kept in mind:

1. Time allotment. After reviewing the course syllabus, the student should set a time goal for a completion date and for the frequency of completed lessons.
2. A place and time for study. Either during school hours or out, the student should select a place and time to work on the course and stick to it.
3. Assistance. Most correspondence schools allow, and even encourage, the student to find local resources for assistance. However, exams are individual and must be proctored.
4. Judicious selection. The student should select only those courses which will be of value and which can be completed given the student's abilities and resources. Strong guidance by the counselor is encouraged.
5. Group study. It is always better to study with another,

even if the other student is taking different courses.

6. Commitment. Many students initially get excited about correspondence study and enroll, only to drop the course later. The student must recognize that correspondence courses require a different kind of study than most school work. This <u>is</u> independent study and requires a strong dose of individual effort.
7. Talk to others. Other students who have taken correspondence courses can give worthwhile advice. It would be best to talk to another student who had already completed the same course the student is interested in.

References

Hunter, J. (Ed.). Guide to independent study through correspondence instruction 1980-1982. Edison, NJ: National University Extension Association, 1980.

Silverman, L. Secondary programs for gifted students. Journal for the Education of the Gifted, 1980, 4, 30-42.

University of Wyoming. Correspondence Study Courses 1981-1982. Laramie: University of Wyoming (School of Extended Studies and Public Service).

Table 1. Number of High School Courses Offered

School	Agriculture	Art	Business Ed.	Computer	Distributive Ed.	Driver Ed.	English	Foreign Lang.	Health/Phys. Ed.	Home Ec.	Industrial Ed.	Math	Multi-disciplin.	Music	Photography	Science	Social Sci.	Study Skills	Total
Univ. of Alabama			2				9	4				10				2	7		34
Univ. of Arizona		3	2				6					7				2	12		32
Univ. of Arkansas*			8				20	6				10				4	14		64
Univ. of California*		1	3			1	14	14		2	2	10		1		6	11	1	66
Univ. of Colorado*		1	4				13					14				10	13	1	56
Univ. of Florida			4				8					9					11		32
Univ. of Idaho			2				9	2				6				4	5		28
Indiana University*		3	12		2		36	16	2	7	3	11	3	1		10	12		118
Univ. of Minnesota*			5				17	yes				11				3	8		44+
Univ. of Missouri*	1	1	10			1	19		1		3	4				6	28		74
Univ. of Nebraska*	2	3	21			1	19	22		5	4	18		5	1	15	15	1	133
Oklahoma State Univ.			6				14					6					10		36
Pennsylvania State U.*						1	11					9				2	4		27
Portland (OR) State U.*			4				9		2			3				3	6		27
Univ. of South Dakota*	2	1	9				16	8		6	1	9					14	1	67
Univ. of Tennessee*		1	6			1	19	4	2			4				3	9		49
Univ. of Texas*			8				15	9	4			13				4	11		64
Utah State Univ.*							6		1			1				1	5		14

* Correspondence Courses

Correspondence Courses

(Table 1. continued)

School	Agriculture	Art	Business Ed.	Computer	Distributive Ed.	Driver Ed.	English	Foreign Lang.	Health/Phys. Ed.	Home Ec.	Industrial Ed.	Math	Multi-disciplin.	Music	Photography	Science	Social Sci	Study Skills	Total
Univ. of Wisconsin*		5	9	1			11	59	1		6	13		2		6	5		118
Univ. of Wyoming*		1	4				5	2		7		4		1		2	7		33
Home Study Institute*	1		2				7	6		3	1	5				2	3		30
Massachusetts (state)		2	4				9	8			2	5				3	6		39
North Dakota (state)	7	7	8			1	12	20	4	9	8	6		4		11	11		108

*Permits high school students enrolling in college courses